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Second of Two Articles

Effective Diplomatic Style

by ROBERT McCLINTOCK

THERE ARE sources of diplomatic power in the field of emotion and mind which can be loosely described as moral or psychological. It seems safe to predict, for example, that a harvest of pro-American sentiment—or at least a better understanding of the United States—will be developed in a group of highly intelligent future leaders in many foreign countries because of the Fulbright program and the exchange of students it entails. Similarly the whole field of propaganda as a source of diplomatic power needs greater exploration and definition of emphasis. We know from the successes of British propaganda in World War I and of Soviet propaganda since World War II how propaganda can bolster diplomacy and contribute to the achievement of national policy.

A fourth element of diplomatic power is political—in the Greek sense of the word—*politikos*, belonging to the citizens or to the state. In a democracy, unless most people sustain a given policy and the diplomacy which is its expression, there can be no true policy or diplomacy. There is, however, a duality in the relations of the statesman and the diplomatist to the people. The statesman must have the support of the people for his policy, but he must also devise a policy which merits and elicits the support of the people. Diplomacy begins at home, and it must be applied at home—which diplomats at times forget.

As the most powerful nation on earth, the United States of necessity has a somewhat effective diplomatic style. The purpose of these reflections on possible improvements in the American diplomatic style is to envision in what ways we might make our power more effective and our style more sure.

As noted above, the American people are not given to politeness otherwise, given our media of information including the press, radio and television, to say nothing of village pump gossip, we are inclined to talk much more in public than a disciplined diplomatic style would desire. Rarely are we disposed to consider the diplomatic impact of a measured silence. The weekly or bi-weekly requirements of a press conference either at the Pentagon, the Department of State or the White House have conditioned us to a sort of Pavlovian reflex. Any time a journalist with a very sharp pencil jabs a question we jump and grope for an answer—or even worse blurt out unnecessary facts. There are times in diplomacy when silences can be thunderous and at other times, intimidating. In developing a more mature diplomatic style we might ponder the virtues of saying nothing.

An illustration of this point which brings us to the next observation to be made, which is on the virtue of truth telling, is the lamentable U-2 incident which took place early in May 1960 at a most embarrassing moment for American diplomacy. In this case we did not choose to say nothing and initially we did not choose to tell the truth; although the State Department spokesman thought he was telling the truth when he read out the "cover story" handed to him. Had we taken a wiser course and kept still we should not have had any necessity to lie; or had we decided to speak, at least we should have told the truth, as eventually we were forced to do.

Anyone who has practiced diplomacy over a number of years knows that its one constant is character. A diplomat who tells lies very soon runs out of credit with his colleagues in the field and with foreign offices at home and abroad. In fact, probably the most self-debilitating aspect of Soviet diplomacy is its cynical disregard for the truth. As indicated in the previous article, de Callières, who worked for a not overly scrupulous master, pointed out that "there is no curse which comes quicker to roost than a lie which has been found out."

Harold Nicolson, so recently as in the October 1961 issue of FOREIGN AFFAIRS, despite the fact that he notes the present mode in falsifying diplomacy and laments that "the old currency has been withdrawn from circulation; we are dealing in a new coinage," continues to insist that "the old principle that the art of negotiation depends on reliability and confidence is an eternal principle however much one's antagonists may profit by temporary tricks." He goes on to add that "it is advisable, therefore, for the westerner to stick always to truth, in the expenditure of which he possesses ample reserves."

Nicolson in the same article quotes his father who was once Ambassador at St. Petersburg as making the following response when he was asked by what means could one ascertain what went on at the back of the oriental mind. "Never worry about that," he answered. "There may be nothing at the back of his mind—concentrate on making sure that he is left in no doubt as to what is at the back of *your* mind."

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The influence of an American Ambassador today is based on the inherent power of the great country he represents and upon his own personal integrity. Should he lack the latter he could not give valid expression to the former. The fact that in the double standards of late 20th Century diplomacy a higher norm is expected of the United States than of the Communist powers proves our moral influence. The American diplomatic style must be based on truth. It is our strongest "unsecret weapon" against the Communist conspiracy.

Possibly because of our constitutional system of checks and balances which involves a high measure of responsibility in foreign affairs in the Senate, and also deriving from the fiscal responsibilities of the House of Representatives in voting funds in support of foreign policy and in particular foreign aid, the American diplomatic style is much influenced by Congressional actions and opinions. Furthermore, because of the effect of Congressional actions and opinions on foreign policy there at times is a confusion among listeners overseas at the multiple voices with which Congressional leaders speak.

THE UNITED States also presents a perhaps confusing aspect to other governments who seek to evaluate our policy and diplomatic line because of the multiple voices of the American press, TV and radio. In a great democracy such as the U. S., public opinion is the ultimate determinant and in consequence the voices of the oracles are listened to. However, there is safety in numbers, and the very multiplicity of our columnists and the variety of our editorial opinions probably provide a certain immunity from the supposition that this or that particular columnist is an unofficial spokesman for the American Government. In other words although at times the chorus of commentary is deafening, we do not have a Pertinax who is regarded as the voice of the Quai nor a Thunderer who supposedly speaks for Downing Street.

The U. S. Government has an almost habitual addiction to the dispatch of *ad hoc* experts to the field to make hurried surveys and return sweeping recommendations to the Administration. At times these missions abroad are harmless. President Roosevelt was a past master of sending importunate political clients overseas "to investigate housing." During the war numerous *ad hoc* experts were dispatched to harried diplomatic missions full of free advice and dubious local contacts. We still hanker after sending the high priced expert or the distinguished retired citizen to look over the shoulder of the American Ambassador in the field with the result that the Ambassador is locally regarded as being held in distrust if not disfavor by the powers-that-be in Washington. Americans seem to be pulled by that attraction which Nicolson noted in his book on diplomacy: that both painting and diplomacy exert an irresistible fascination for the amateur.*

While the United States should use to the fullest its abundance of *expertise* and should rejoice that its Congress wishes to learn at first hand of conditions abroad in order therefore to support an intelligent foreign policy, in the development of a mature diplomatic style we might, perhaps, begin to inhibit our use of *ad hoc* experts.

In the development of a mature American diplomatic style let us revert now to one of the early definitions of "style" which, as was pointed out, comes from the Latin word *stilus*, the Roman equivalent of the pen. The State Department evolved from the Committee on Correspondence.

Perhaps nothing over the past twenty years has so lessened the dignity and impact of American diplomatic style as the creeping advent of bad grammar and the proliferation of solecisms pushed forward under the pretext of efficiency. The Department's own telegrams (to say nothing of those from the field) are lamentable. Affairs of state are "finalized soonest." We need fewer but more literate words expressed with a regard for style.

It might be noted that the telegrams from the Foreign Office and the Quai d'Orsay are still written in the first person. Her Majesty's Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs says "I" when a telegram is sent to HBM's ambassador. Similarly, the French Foreign Minister speaks personally to his representatives abroad even though his telegrams (fluently written in lucid style) may have been drafted by a subordinate officer. In a meeting of American, French and British chiefs of mission at which telegraphic official instructions are compared, in most cases the American telegram will seem far inferior in style and in clearness of drafting to its French or British equivalent.

As with telegrams so with despatches and instructions. While it is not recommended that these documents be written with quill pens or subscribed "your humble and obedient servant," it is suggested that the former Foreign Service despatch addressed to the Secretary of State had much more dignity and weight when it started with the initial clause "I have the honor," and so forth, and ended with the simple subscription "Respectfully yours." Officers in the field will feel a certain moral impact if they have the impression they are writing to the Secretary of State and writing with respect. The present efficiency forms have so depersonalized the reporting function that they are on the brink of being reduced to an IBM punch card.

HOWEVER, form will not make a clear dispatch any more than will chemistry convincingly make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. On this point de Callières said,

> "Incapable men acting abroad will make nothing even of the most brilliant instructions; capable men, by the accuracy and sagacity of their reports and suggestions, can do much to improve even the most mediocre instructions, and therefore the responsibility for diplomatic action is in reality shared in about equal degree between the home government and its servants abroad."

The same authority also quoted a diplomatic colleague as saying that, "a despatch written in an orderly fashion and in several short, clear paragraphs was like a palace lighted by many windows so that there was not a dark corner in it."

Under our *ad hoc* diplomatic style, rushing off experts before looking in the files, or, at the other extreme, prescrib-

*Charles Thayer in his book, "Diplomat," has expressed it in race course terms. He points out that while the gentleman rider on his own horse may do very well, it is the professional jockey of long experience who can ride any horse.

ing the conduct of the officer in the field in the minutest administrative detail, we have evolved a gigantic three-volume compendium called the "Foreign Service Manual" to guide our diplomats abroad. It may be, perhaps, instructive to recall that in the "old days" the American diplomat was given "The Instructions to Diplomatic Officers" which numbered not more than 150 loose-leafed, small pages. It was a book admirable for its brevity and is for that reason now submerged in the spate from the government mimeographing machines. It is worth digging out the old Instructions to read that "the three most pre-eminent qualities necessary to the style of a diplomatic note are precision, suavity and clarity." On the last point the old "Instructions" merit quotation in full:

> "To attain clarity, the composition should always be, insofar as possible, a complete effort not dependent in any way on other documents or previous correspondence. Although the files of a foreign office are available to its members, the writer of a note should endeavor to phrase it in such a way as to cause the least research, as the persons who have the large decisions to make are usually too hurried to read through masses of correspondence called up by reference in a note. For the same reason, unduly long sentences should be avoided and fine writing, epigrams, and stylistic excrescences of every kind omitted. Even figures of speech which would adorn literary composition should be cast aside unless they contribute to the understanding of the problem at hand. *Insofar as possible it should be the aim of the writer to make his communication so clear and concise that it could be understood a hundred years hence and translated into a foreign language by someone who knew nothing whatever of the subject.*" (Italics added.)

ONE REFORM which should be easy to achieve would be to modify the Foreign Service entrance examinations to include essay type questions. At the present time applicants for the Foreign Service are given searching true-or-false type examinations which require no more epistolary effort than writing plus or minus. In "the old days," the essay-type question was mandatory. If one of the essentials of diplomacy is precise and lucid drafting, it seems odd that we make no test of this ability of our candidates for the Foreign Service.*

Another aspect of American diplomatic style is the popular misconception that the purpose of diplomacy is to deal directly with peoples. This notion has also found lodgment at certain levels in the Department of State. It is indeed incumbent upon an able ambassador and his staff to get out into the country to which they are accredited to "meet the people," to make human as well as formal contact and to present to all elements an objective visage of the United States. However, it is not the first duty of a diplomat to deal with all the people all the time. As Ambassador Bohlen pointed out in a speech at Kansas City in May 1961, "Diplomacy . . . is primarily the art or profession of the transaction of affairs between governments." This fact at times causes American diplomatic style to appear in various distortions. Since the days of Woodrow Wilson when he appealed over the heads of governments to the various peoples of Europe in support of his Fourteen Points there has been a tendency in American diplomatic style toward political astigmatism focusing at times on people, at times on governments, and at times on both.

NEVERTHELESS American diplomatic style will be much enhanced if the American diplomatic establishment overseas, while maintaining its main business with the government to which it is accredited, should likewise have a keen eye out for all elements in the body politic. At times our policy has too often been embodied in one ruler and when that one personality suddenly disappeared from the scene, we had, at least temporarily, no policy. The abdication of King Farouk in 1952 and the assassination of Nuri Said Pasha in 1958 are cases in point.

The American Ambassador and members of his staff can undoubtedly gain in both popular as well as official influence if to the extent of their capabilities they can reflect some of the peculiarly American interests and qualities. It should impose no particular strain on any able Foreign Service Officer or Ambassador to evince an interest in such American specialties as education or the latest developments of our great industrial civilization and our science. Such an interest embodied in the diplomat overseas usually finds a response in the more forward looking and influential elements of the foreign society. One of the great sources of Franklin's diplomatic success in Europe was not that he was merely the Minister of the United States accredited to the Court of Louis XVI, but that he was one of the foremost scientists of the Age of Enlightenment.

In considering a diplomatic style which accommodates itself to popular diplomacy the U. S. could well be more careful than it is toward the sensitivity of other races and peoples. We have long talked in a somewhat patronizing fashion of Chinese "face", but anyone who has lived in the Far East knows that face is a psychological and political reality. Likewise in assuming that Arabs should act in a more rational way toward Israel we are prone to disregard what the Arab thinks of as his "dignity," which is strongly akin to the Chinese "face." In dealing with the new nations we must expect them to be hypersensitive over the independence they have so recently won and the trappings as well as the attributes of sovereignty which are yet new to them. As a last word it might be pointed out that the newer and smaller the country the greater the degree of protocol.

American diplomatic style could be improved in terms of parliamentary diplomacy. On the whole American conference diplomacy is the best researched and prepared of any in the world. As a rule we are successful in our conference diplomacy. However, often for reasons extraneous to the subject matter of the conference we dissipate our influence by rushing into procedural debates which for political reasons seem important to us. Our diplomatic style in conference diplomacy would be improved if we concentrated on the substantive points rather than wasted our substance on procedure.

THE MOST difficult form of diplomacy is that of the maintenance and operation of a coalition of sovereign states. This is the exercise in seeking to obtain joint objectives

*This reform suggested by the writer has already been implemented and announced to the public.

while preserving a continuous balance of shifting national self-interests. The successful operation of coalition diplomacy therefore becomes a blend of national styles in diplomacy. In NATO, for example, we find the British, French and American characteristic styles contrasted with those of such widely differing states as Iceland, Belgium and Portugal. The history of Western Europe since the wars of the Spanish Succession shows that coalitions are of themselves ephemeral; although basic national self interests in the history of Europe have revealed certain consistent patterns of which that of Britain is the most memorable as the make-weight and ultimate arbiter of the Concert of Europe.

If we keep in mind that no coalition can outlast the combined self interest of its members, and that coalitions in peace are more difficult to make effective than coalitions in war because there is less seeming urgency and peril to give them cohesion and joint effort, we may truthfully look upon the successful management of a coalition as the supreme test of diplomatic skill. In our present series of concentric alliances the U. S. has not done badly, although we will find that the most effective coalitions are those in which the members are more cognate, one to another, and the pressures binding them together are the most intense; e.g. the relatively efficient and powerful NATO as compared with SEATO. We should not be surprised or dismayed if our role of leadership in coalition diplomacy causes us to be somewhat less than popular. As a French Ambassador once murmured to Gladstone, "I do not resent your having a card up your sleeve, but I do resent your thinking that God put it there."

As foreign diplomats have noted, the U.S. has a highly expert professional Foreign Service and can call upon a wealth of talent in foreign affairs from other sources. Certainly the Department of State is the best informed of all foreign ministries on earth. We rejoice in a robust political system in which the give and take of politics and the exchange of ideas, sharpened by an alert press, bring forth the best qualities of the American character, and make possible the reflection of those qualities in our foreign policy and diplomatic style.

Essentially any "diplomatic style" must be expressed in human terms. We have not yet and probably never will arrive at a "computer diplomacy" unless the so-called progress of science has converted the human race to robots and reduced the traditional exchanges of Ambassadors to a game of punched cards. Therefore, if the essence of diplomacy is character, courtesy, integrity and the high art of cultivating human relations, it places perhaps a greater premium on extraordinary qualities in the personnel than any other profession.

The changing requirements of present day diplomacy and the adaptation of our diplomatic style to new environments have imposed responsibilities on the American Ambassador overseas which were undreamt of in the old diplomacy. In addition to the requirements noted above of maintaining intimate and confident relations with the government to which he is accredited, while at the same time keeping a positive finger on the popular pulse and presenting a fair portrait of American culture to a foreign audience, the American Ambassador today has the additional and at times gigantic task of administering not only an Embassy but an aid, a propaganda, and an intelligence program. The days when an Ambassador might be picked for his wealth and social graces are no longer with us. The Ambassador today must not only be a clear-headed and tactful diplomatist. In his new and more confident relationship to the President, he is expected to know not only what is going on in the country to which he is accredited and what is going on in the country which accredits him, but also what is going on in every department of his huge Mission. He is the conductor of a symphony orchestra of many players for which the President calls the tune.

Thus it can be seen that there are many aspects of diplomatic style. It is subject to a variety of definitions, as is also diplomacy. Furthermore, the national diplomatic style may appear to foreigners as something quite different from what it appears to ourselves. Basically, however, it incorporates the national characteristics. It would be hypocritical as well as fruitless to seek improvement in American diplomatic style by trying to make us act other than as we are.

However, it is clearly within the American character, which seeks innovation, change and betterment, to re-examine our present techniques and attitudes and to suggest here and there how we can achieve a more mature, alert and creative diplomatic style. Such improvements, while having in mind the immense power to which American diplomacy gives expression and all the elements of such power, would also have regard to the virtues of silence; to the absolute necessity of telling the truth; to the need for muting or perhaps at least coordinating the mixed voices with which we sometimes speak; to the need for a more literate correspondence between the Department and the field and vice versa; to a clear-eyed distinction as between the necessity for dealing with governments while at the same time keeping in mind the characteristics of the people whom the governments represent; to a more realistic application of parliamentary diplomacy toward substance rather than procedure; to the sustained skill required of coalition diplomacy; to keeping in mind at all times the need to develop policies worthy of popular support, and thus ensuring popular support for worthy policies; and finally, to developing means to make a career service which will attract officers of the very highest intellect, integrity and capacity, who by their own attainments will embody an American diplomatic style.

IF WE can achieve these not inconsiderable reforms we might then be in a position to develop a diplomatic style which would be reflective of what Senator Fulbright postulated as the ideal: "over the long pull ahead the U. S. must remain true to its inner self, its historical ideals." We might, in sum, be able to translate into action the words of President Kennedy at Chapel Hill, October 12, 1961:

"We must distinguish the real from the illusory, the significant from the petty. But if we can be purposeful, if we can face up to our risks and live up to our word, if we can do our duty undeterred by fanatics or frenzy at home or abroad, then surely peace and freedom can prevail. We shall be neither Red nor dead, but alive and free worthy of the traditions and responsibilities of '. . . the United States of America.'"